

DEEP BREATHING

Most of us don't breathe from the diaphragm. Instead, we take shallow breaths from our upper chests. When we're stressed, our breath becomes even shallower. The problem is that shallow breathing limits the amount of oxygen we take in—which makes us feel even more tense, short of breath, and anxious. Deep breathing, on the other hand, encourages full oxygen exchange throughout the chest and lungs.

Chest Breathing vs. Abdominal Breathing

When you breathe from your chest, you inhale about a teacup of oxygen. Instead, you should breathe from your abdomen. When you breathe from your abdomen, you inhale about a quart of oxygen. The more oxygen you inhale, the better.

How you breathe also affects your nervous system. Chest breathing makes your brain create shorter, more restless brain waves. Abdominal breathing makes your brain create longer, slower brain waves. These longer and slower brain waves are similar to the ones your brain makes when you are relaxed and calm. So, breathing from the abdomen helps you relax quickly.

Source: [University of Pittsburgh Medical Center](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_relief_meditation_yoga_relaxation.htm)

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths powered by the diaphragm, deep breathing can help you get your stress levels in check. The next time you feel uptight, try taking a minute to slow down and breathe deeply:

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

If you have a hard time breathing from your abdomen sitting up, lie on the floor, put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale. Breathing techniques can be practiced almost anywhere and can be combined with other relaxation exercises, such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

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